

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

INTRODUCTION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL EQUAL RIGHTS ACT

HON. CARDISS COLLINS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 4, 1996

Mrs. COLLINS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the Environmental Equal Rights Act to promote equity, justice, and community involvement in the selection of the location of waste facilities. My bill gets at the heart of the need to locate waste facilities in locations which minimize the total impact on the health and well-being of nearby residents from sources of contamination. It would establish a process for exercising our inherent rights respecting the development and evolution of our communities.

In the past, sites for many waste facilities have invariably been chosen for the wrong reasons. Since it is politically difficult to select any location, the choice has often come down to a question of political influence: Those with the least have lost.

The result is that too many facilities have been placed in communities populated largely by minorities and the poor. These sitings regularly occur irrespective of the suitability of the site, and of critical importance, irrespective of the degree to which the community is already exposed to the polluting facilities. It is a simple fact of life that these communities usually do not have the financial or political resources to compete on these issues with other neighborhoods. Consequently, as multiple facilities are placed in minority and poor communities, the residents of these communities face unjustifiably severe health hazards and have no vehicle with which to protect themselves from such exposures.

According to a 1992 University of Michigan study, the proportion of minorities in communities which have a commercial hazardous waste facility is about double that in communities without such facilities. The University of Michigan study found that, where two or more such facilities are located, the proportion of minorities is more than triple that of communities without a facility.

In a 1992 report, the Environmental Protection Agency corroborated the evidence of the disproportionate impact of contaminants or racial minority and low-income populations when it concluded that these groups experience higher than average exposures to selected air pollutants and hazardous waste facilities.

Currently, projected human health impacts of a new waste facility usually do not figure into the decision of whether or not to award a permit. Once again, recent studies have found that urban, minority communities are the most exposed to particulates, sulfates, and other contaminants.

The Environmental Equal Rights Act [EERA] would allow citizens of an environmentally disadvantaged community in which a waste facility has been proposed to be sited to challenge the siting. A successful challenge would pre-

vent the issuance of a permit for construction and operation of the proposed facility.

A challenge would be based on whether the proposed facility is located within 2 miles of another waste facility, Superfund site, or facility that releases toxic contaminants; and whether it is in a community that has a higher than average percentage of low-income or minority residents. The petitioner would also have to show that the proposed facility may adversely affect the human health or the environmental quality of the community.

Mr. Speaker, the Environmental Equal Rights Act will equip environmentally disadvantaged communities with basic tools to protect their environment and the health of their residents. These tools are necessary to compensate communities that are underrepresented and have fewer resources with which to protect themselves. We should all be able to agree that underrepresentation is an unacceptable basis for exposing people to substances which can impair mental development and cause harmful health conditions. To stop short of providing these rights would perpetuate the gross injustices and exposures to risks that have become all too common.

INTRODUCTION OF THE ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION ACT

HON. WILLIAM J. COYNE

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 4, 1996

Mr. COYNE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce an important piece of legislation. This bill, the Economic Revitalization Act, would expand the Federal Government's role in encouraging local economic development efforts across the country.

Many communities across the country have experienced unprecedented job loss and economic dislocation in recent years. These communities are in desperate need of economic development activities that will provide new jobs and tax revenues.

Prior to my election to Congress, I served for a number of years as a member of the Pittsburgh City Council. My service on the city council provided me with substantial first-hand knowledge about the many difficult challenges facing State and local governments.

Since I left the city council to become a Member of Congress, the demands on State and local governments have increased substantially while the resources at their disposal have declined. In the last 15 years, the Federal Government has eliminated General Revenue Sharing and Urban Development Action Grants. It has also limited funding for programs like the Economic Development Administration and Community Development Block Grants.

At the same time, the Federal Government has imposed a number of unfunded mandates on State and local governments that require expensive new investments in infrastructure

like water and sewage treatment facilities. Such investments have clearly improved many Americans' quality of life, but they have also consumed large portions of State and local governments' scarce capital budgets, which might otherwise have been used to foster economic development.

Something needs to be done to target Federal economic development assistance at our most troubled communities. The empowerment zone/enterprise community legislation enacted in 1993 was landmark legislation, but the law only authorized empowerment zones and enterprise communities in 104 areas around the country. There are many more communities in this country that need this kind of help. Moreover, while the EZ/EC program will provide much-needed Federal assistance to the designated EZ/EC communities, the program does not provide adequate resources even for these communities to successfully address the difficult social problems that they face.

Consequently, I introduced a bill in 1993—shortly after the enactment of the EZ/EC legislation—that would provide economic development assistance to all of the local governments across the country that qualified as distressed communities.

This legislation would establish a new type of tax-exempt private activity bond, the distressed community economic development bond. The distressed community economic development bond would be targeted at communities that have been hard hit by population loss, job loss, slow growth, or military base closings. Communities which meet the bill's criteria for designation as distressed communities could issue tax-exempt bonds to promote a wide range of economic development projects within their jurisdictions.

This legislation was not adopted in the 103d Congress, so I am introducing it again today. I believe that this legislation would provide economically hard-hit communities with the necessary means to foster economic growth and create new jobs.

I do not pretend that this initiative would solve all of the problems of our most troubled communities. It could, however, constitute part of the solution. In light of the sharp decline in Federal support for State and local governments in recent years—and the concurrent growth in federally imposed mandates on those same governments—congressional action to encourage economic development is long overdue.

I invite my colleagues to join me as cosponsors of this much-needed legislation.

MARATHON GIRLS ARE FIELD HOCKEY CHAMPIONS AGAIN

HON. JAMES T. WALSH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 4, 1996

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, I am asking today that my colleagues join me in saluting

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